

*Requested by Lt. Cmdr. Barker, Mr. Taylor's staff*  
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*from [redacted] 31 Aug.*

**RET**  
*29 Aug. B WH with Amory on*

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
 30 August 1961

Control No. 0073-61

**MEMORANDUM**

**SUBJECT : The Ho Chi Minh Trail**

1. The so-called Ho Chi Minh Trail is in reality a complex of paths and trails through the mountainous highlands that extend through much of Vietnam, inland from the coastal plain. During the war against the French that ended in 1954, the Communist Viet Minh used various north-south mountain trails to supply their units in what is now South Vietnam. Collectively, these trails and paths, designed to afford maximum security in the movement of supplies and men, became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

2. The Trail for the most part is suitable only for use by coolie supply columns and is generally not traversable by vehicular traffic. An indication of the capacity of the Trail is shown by the following figures derived from a Viet Minh decree of 1952:

Loads for Human Porters

Type of Load	Normal Load (pounds)		Normal Journey (miles per day)	
	Level Country	Mountains	Level Country	Mountains
Rice	55	30	15 (day)	9 (day)
Arms	33/44	22/33	12 (night)	7 (night)

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3. The Trail as used by the Viet Minh has been characterized by a considerable degree of flexibility. Because of the many paths forming the complex, it has been relatively easy for the Communists to shift from one to another in some areas as security conditions dictated. This tactic, however, is more difficult in other areas where extremely dense natural vegetation may require extensive work to establish a new path.

4. It is believed that interdiction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail would be difficult on several counts. In addition to the flexible nature of the Trail, its considerable length and frequently rugged terrain militate against constant surveillance. The probably small number of persons using the Trail on any given segment also reduces the chance of detection.

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